



Fact Sheet Three

Trials to enhance private sector roles in extension



This project is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of its Rural R&D for Profit programme.

Stimulating private sector extension in Australian agriculture to increase returns from R&D is a three-year project (2016-18) to develop and test models to build the capacity of the private sector in delivering extension services to Australian producers. Prior to the trials, earlier project phases:

- *Developed an understanding of private sector engagement with producers and RD&E;*
- *Identified barriers to private sector involvement in agricultural extension, and;*
- *Developed interventions to enhance the private sector's capability in agricultural extension.*

In the second phase of the project, four trials will be undertaken involving researchers, rural research and development corporations (RDCs), private advisers and producers.

Trials are action research processes to develop and test models of engagement between the private sector and the RD&E system. Trials are being established in collaboration with the project partners and the private sector. Each trial addresses a different high-priority context.

All trials involve a partnership between a rural R&D corporation or state government, an organisation from the private advisory sector, a social researcher from the University of Melbourne and participants who co-develop approaches to address an engagement challenge. The challenges include those involving a shared interest, technological, business or technical question and in which greater private sector involvement is required.

Trial themes were developed from the feedback from producer and adviser forums held in 2016. Each trial is supported by a private-sector adviser operating as a project officer.

1. This fact sheet provides an overview of the four trials:
 1. Value-chain/Processor Trial (shared interest focus);
 2. Precision Agriculture Trial (technology focus);
 3. Advisory Pathways Trial (business model focus), and;
 4. Knowledge Trial (technical focus)

1. Processor Trial

Connecting producers, farm advisers, researchers and Research Development Corporations with the processing sector as a supply chain response to RD&E needs

Industry lead: Dairy Australia (DA) Participating agricultural industries: Dairy Australia, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Australian Pork Limited (APL)

Private advisory sector partners: Dairy processor and a red meat processor

Research lead: Assoc Prof Ruth Nettle and Nicole Reichelt, The University of Melbourne

The relationship between processors and producers often extends beyond the transaction of product to the provision of support and advisory services.

There is an opportunity to engage with processing staff for the delivery of R&D outputs within dairy and red meat supply chains for producer benefit.

1. Securing quality milk supply through enhanced field services

Aim: A milk company will work collaboratively with Dairy Australia, farm advisers and researchers to enhance

the support services offered by field services staff to producers. This will be achieved by developing particular skills of the field services team and looking at how the processor is connected with dairy RD&E.

2. Meeting market specifications

Aim: A red meat processing company will work with Meat and Livestock Australia, Australian Pork Limited, farm advisers, researchers and the public sector to progress the role of the livestock buyer in providing feedback from processing of livestock to producers. The aim is to increase compliance with market specifications and improve access to R&D outputs to enhance supply chain performance.

2. Precision Ag Trial

Increasing the capacity of farm advisers to engage with digital applications based on industry research, development and extension to benefit producers.

Industry lead: Cotton Research and Development Corporation (CRDC)

Participating industries: CRDC, Sugar Research Australia (SRA),

Private sector partner: A precision agriculture technology provider

Research lead: Dr Margaret Ayre, The University of Melbourne

The Precision Agriculture Trial explores the application of particular precision ag technologies in the cotton, sugar and meat and livestock industries. It involves a partnership between CRDC and a precision agriculture technology provider (to be identified).

The Precision Ag Trial addresses two problem contexts:

1. Improving understanding of the value proposition for advisers and producers to invest in precision agriculture technologies; i.e. how advisers can identify what technology producers should invest in and then interpret the technology in a farm context.
2. Improving understanding on how the data generated by the farm business can be used and translated by advisers and producers into on-farm decision-making. Learning from this trial is potentially transferrable to translating research into on-farm application more generally and the role RDCs can play in this translation process

3. Advisory Pathways Trial (business focus)

Creating career development pathways for new entrants and professionals in the agricultural advisory and extension sector.

Industry lead: Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)

Participating industries: Cross-sectoral

Private sector partner: One large and several medium

private advisory/consultancy firms with mentoring capacity

Research lead: Dr Barbara King, The University of Melbourne

The Advisory Pathways Trial explores ways for rural R&D corporations, universities, and small and medium enterprise (SME) farm consultancy businesses to jointly develop new strategies to develop the capability and career opportunities of extension professionals. The trial focuses on training, network development and mentoring for new entrants into the advisory sector as well as experienced advisers. The trial will offer opportunities for generic and targeted advisory skill development, tailored to industry context and needs.

4. Knowledge Trial

Exploring ways to improve access to, and engagement with, the latest research, while identifying needs and opportunities to help translate theory into meaningful practice.

Lead: Agriculture Victoria

Participating industries: Sugar Research Australia (SRA), Department of Primary Industries, New South Wales (DPI NSW)

Private sector partner: Private advisers, researchers and industry network representatives

Research lead: Dr Jana-Axinja Paschen, The University of Melbourne

This trial will focus on translating current research into easily accessible information that is practice-relevant and can be applied on-farm. It will explore the “value proposition” for private advisers to become more involved in the shaping of research directions and to contribute to the development of networks for the sharing of knowledge and learning, in order to enable more integrated, whole-farm-systems approaches to agricultural advice. This trial requires collaboration between State governments, industry, advisers and primary producers. This includes questions such as:

- Where does the impetus for new research come from?
- How can private sector engagement with new R&D be improved?
- How can theory be translated into meaningful practice?

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